

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1985

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T MADRID 3661

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR/OVIP (FORD, GERALD)

SUBJ: PRESIDENT'S VISIT: BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON PRIME

MINISTER ARIAS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PASS TO SECRETARY

1. SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE CHOICE BY FRANCO FOR THE PREMIERSHIP, ARIAS WAS SELECTED PRIMARILY FOR HIS LOYALTY TO FRANCO AND THE SYSTEM AND HIS EXPERIENCE AS MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND SECURITY CHIEF. HE WAS ALSO HELPED BY BEING A FAVORITE OF MRS. FRANCO. ARIAS' SUBSEQUENT COMMITMENT TO LIBERALIZATION--WHICH HE HAS HAD CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY IMPLEMENTING--HAS UNDERSTANDABLY EARNED HIM SOME RESENTMENT IN FRANCO'S FAMILY AND CONSERVATIVE ENTOURAGE WHO LOOKED TO HIM PRIMARILY FOR CONTINUITY AND TIGHT CONTROL.

2. ARIAS IS VERY MUCH A PRODUCT OF FRANCO SYSTEM, HAVING COME UP BUREAUCRATIC ROUTE AS CIVIL GOVERNOR, SECURITY POLICE CHIEF, MAYOR OF MADRID AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR. THIS BACKGROUND HAS CONTRIBUTED TO HIS CAUTION ABOUT EVEN MILD POLITICAL EXPERIMENTS, AND HIS OVERRIDING STRESS ON PUBLIC ORDER. WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF HIS PERIOD AS MAYOR, HIS EXPERIENCE HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY GOOD PREPARATION FOR PRESIDING OVER SPAIN'S MORE OPEN POLITICAL PROCESS OR FOR REFEREEING

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INCREASINGLY FREQUENT CLASHES OF INTEREST GROUPS INSIDE

AND OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT. AT SAME TIME, ARIAS HAS DISPLAYED INNATE POLITICAL SKILLS. HE IS THICK-SKINNED AND PATIENT AND IS GENERALLY PERCEPTIVE ABOUT SPAIN'S REAL PLACE IN WORLD AND ITS INTERNAL NEEDS AND PRIORITIES.

3. COMING TO POWER AT A TIME WHEN PRESSURES FOR CHANGE ARE GROWING AND FRANCO'S STRENGTH IS SLIPPING, ARIAS HAS HAD A TOUGH TIME THREADING A COURSE BETWEEN POWERFUL FORCES WHICH SEEK TO PERPETUATE THE FRANCO SYSTEM AND THOSE PRESSING FOR CHANGES, SOME OF THEM FAR REACHING. HE IS ALSO HARRIED IN TRYING TO BALANCE OFF THE DEMANDS AND PRESSURES OF VARIOUS POWER CENTERS, SUCH AS THE ARMY, THE RIGHT-WING, CONSERVATIVE BUSINESS INTERESTES, THE PUBLIC ORDER FORCES AND THE CHURCH, ALL OF WHICH HAVE BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE WITH THE DECLINE OF FRANCO'S ENERGY AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP. AT SAME TIME, HE IS FACED WITH CONFLICTING IMPERATIVES OF PERSONAL LOYALTY TO FRANCO ON ONE HAND AND THE RECOGNIZED NEED FOR REFORMS ON THE OTHER TO CONFORM TO CHANGES IN SPANISH SOCIETY. FINALLY HE MUST SOMEHOW ASSERT ENOUGH AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH THOSE PROBLEMS AND PUSH THROUGH HIS OWN POLICIES WHILE STILL OPERATING ENTIRELY IN SHADOW OF FRANCO. HE IS KNOWN TO FORESEE AND FAVOR MORE RAPID POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AFTER FRANCO'S PASSING.

4. WHILE ARIAS HAS REPUTATION FOR FIRMNESS, HE HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY TOLERANT OF DISSENT AND POLICY CONFLICTS WITHIN HIS ADMINISTRATION. IN PART BECAUSE OF THIS TOLERANT STYLE, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE CONFLICTING AND COMPETITIVE ELEMENTS WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE SYSTEM, MANY SPANIARDS ARE INCLINED TO SEE HIS ADMINISTRATION AS DRIFTING AND INDECISIVE.

5. IN HIS PERSONAL CONTACTS, HE IS WARM, CHARMING AND WITTY AND SUCCEEDS IN CONVEYING AN AIR OF FRANKNESS AND SINCERITY. HE SPEAKS WELL AND IS PRECISE IN HIS STATEMENTS. I HAVE ON THE WHOLE FOUND HIM VERY WELL DISPOSED TOWARD THE US, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT HE RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE US MILITARY PRESENCE TO THE SECURITY OF SPAIN, WESTERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN. AT THE SAME TIME, HE IS CLEARLY IRRITATED BY THE CONTINUING REJECTION OF SPAIN BY
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